

5 Major Myths About SPF That Could Get You Seriously Burned

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Whether you're jetting off to a semi-exotic island or have plans to hang out at home and play lacrosse in your backyard with your BFF, there's one item that should top your spring break checklist no matter your destination: SPF. No eye rolls, please: melanoma is the second most common form of cancer for people ages 15 to 29 years old according to the Skin Cancer Foundation, and it can crop up even if you think you're completely covered — or don't necessarily think you need to be. Here, the five common SPF myths to stop believing once and for all so you can ensure you're totally protected from the sun, clouds or shine.

Myth #1: I'm already tan, so I won't burn.

Even if you aren't heading to the beach and simply spending the day outdoors, would you trust sunscreen with SPF 4 to fully protect you? Tanned skin provides the equivalent of SPF 4, so the "base tan" most teens believe reduces their chances of getting burned offers no real defense against the sun's rays. "Plus, any change in skintone is an indication of sun damage," says David Stoll, MD, a Beverly Hills-based dermatologist. "Your skin isn't 'getting used to' the sun. Whether you burn easily or not at all, your skin absolutely needs coverage from both UVA and UVB rays." Skipping out on a broad-spectrum SPF can lead to the development of sun spots later down the line, which darken in color with continued exposure to UV rays — rendering your

favorite toner useless.

Myth #2: My makeup has SPF in it.

No matter your preference — whether it's foundation, tinted moisturizer, or a BB cream — it can be tempting to cut down your morning routine and conquer two steps in one sweep by wearing makeup packed with SPF. However, the SPF in your makeup may not necessarily be high enough to cancel out the sun's rays. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends using a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher on the daily. And regardless of the type of SPF, sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours in order to for it to work effectively, notes Debbie Palmer, DO, a board-certified dermatologist and founder of Replere Skin Care. "Sure, makeup with SPF is convenient, but it also needs to be reapplied in order to achieve the best sun protection possible." Load up on a broad-spectrum SPF in the a.m., and tuck a CC cream with at least SPF 30 in your bag so you can re-apply on the go.

Myth #3: The higher the SPF, the more protected I am.

With a ton of SPF 80 or 100+ options available now on the market, it seems like sunscreens are soaring to new levels of coverage — but the protection they offer tapers off after a certain point, so you don't have to slather yourself in SPF 100 to lessen your chances of getting burned. "There isn't very much of a difference protection-wise between an SPF 30 and an SPF 85," Dr. Stoll explains. "They're functionally the same, with the protection factor differing by just a few decimal points." If you wear at least SPF 30 on the reg (AKA every day), consider yourself covered. You may want to bump up the SPF though if you're taking a trip to a destination with a vastly different UV index than your hometown.

Myth #4: An SPF is all I need to be adequately protected from the sun.

Protecting yourself from both UVA and UVB rays can mean a burn-free beach

day and softer, smoother, clearer skin in the long run. Look for sunscreens with the words “broad-spectrum” clearly displayed on the bottle, which protect against both types of rays. Sunscreens with SPF only shield against UVB rays, which lead to the painful, itchy redness of a typical sunburn — think b for burns — while unprotected exposure to UVA rays results in long-term skin damage like age spots and premature wrinkles — but both can cause skin cancer, notes Dr. Palmer.

Myth #5: Sprays don’t protect as well as lotions.

Perfect for self-proclaimed lazy girls, spray lotions significantly shorten sunscreen application — and contrary to popular belief, they provide the same amount of coverage from the sun. “A sunscreen will provide the SPF effectiveness listed on the label of the product, regardless of formula,” Dr. Palmer says. The difference is making sure that you’re not missing any areas in your application. If you have any doubts, double up on your SPF mist and take care not to overlook random spots like your ears, backs of the knees, or feet. This can mean the difference between a fun, burn-free day in the sun and a raw, red tint to your skin that lasts for days.